

## Why GAO Did This Study

Large numbers of civilians in war-torn areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have been the victims of horrific violence, including rape, mutilation, and sexual slavery carried out by armed groups and others. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act mandated GAO to submit to appropriate congressional committees a report assessing the rate of sexual and gender-based violence in war-torn areas of the DRC and adjoining countries. This report aims to provide Congress with the best possible understanding of the most recent estimates of sexual violence in eastern DRC and adjoining countries as it considers the range of policy options available to address the alarming incidence of such violence in the region.

This report identifies and assesses available information on sexual violence in war-torn eastern DRC and adjoining countries. GAO reviewed and analyzed reports, memorandums, and other documents and interviewed officials from the Department of State (State), other United States agencies, and the United Nations (UN), as well as researchers and representatives from nongovernmental organizations.

## What GAO Recommends

This report does not contain recommendations. GAO provided a draft of this report to State and other relevant agencies for review and comment. These agencies reviewed the report and responded that they did not have comments.

# THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

## Information on the Rate of Sexual Violence in War-Torn Eastern DRC and Adjoining Countries

## What GAO Found

Of the two types of data on sexual violence from war-torn eastern DRC and adjoining countries GAO reviewed—data from population-based surveys and case file data—population-based surveys are more appropriate for estimating a rate of sexual violence. Unlike case file data, surveys are conducted using the techniques of random sampling and their results are generalizable. However, there are limitations and challenges to using surveys to gather sexual violence data and estimate rates of violence, particularly in eastern DRC. Specifically, GAO found the following:

- Three population-based surveys provide data on the rate of sexual violence in eastern DRC. The most recent survey, conducted in eastern DRC in 2010, estimated that 9 percent of the population had experienced some form of sexual violence in the 1-year period from March 2009 through March 2010. An earlier survey in eastern DRC conducted in late 2007 estimated about 16 percent of the population had experienced sexual violence over the period 1993 through 2007, although this survey did not employ the standard survey estimation techniques used in the 2010 survey. The third survey was conducted in early to mid-2007 and estimated that about 8 percent of females in North Kivu and 6 percent of females in South Kivu had experienced sexual violence within the 1-year period preceding the survey.
- Two population-based surveys for Uganda—the only adjoining country for which such information is available—provide data on the rate of sexual violence. The most recent survey, conducted in 2010 in four districts in northern Uganda, estimated less than 0.5 percent of the population reported experiencing sexual violence at the hands of armed groups in the 1-year period from April 2009 to April 2010. An earlier survey conducted nationwide in Uganda in 2006 estimated 39 percent of females and 11 percent of males had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lifetimes.
- There are limitations and challenges to using population-based surveys to gather data and estimate rates of sexual violence, particularly in war-torn areas like eastern DRC. For example, there can be undercoverage due to poor infrastructure and insecurity which can limit access to some areas; underreporting, as survey response rates partly depend on whether or not sexual violence victims are willing to discuss such difficult experiences; and higher survey costs if large sample sizes are required.
- Case file data, such as data collected by medical service providers or law enforcement agencies on sexual violence victims, can provide indicators that sexual assaults are occurring in certain locations and can help service providers respond to the needs of victims. However, since case file data are based on a nonrandom sample, the results of analyzing such data are not generalizable. Also, UN officials and others noted that case file data are largely anecdotal and not uniform, and service providers are generally hesitant to share their data with outside parties.